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Katherine Anne Porter's "Old Mortality" and Virginia Woolf: A Study in Feminism

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KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S "OLD MORTALITY" AND VIRGINIA WOOLF: A STUDY IN FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to reconsider Katherine Anne Porter in the light of postmodern feminist theory and to compare her work and philosophy to those of Virginia Woolf.

The research, conducted at University of Maryland Library where the Katherine Anne Porter collection is kept, suggests that Porter shared similar views to Woolf on sexual politics. Examining Katherine Anne Porter's "Old Mortality" and a range of Woolf's work in conjunction with Julia Kristeva's postmodernist theory, my study explores the close-knit relationship of their philosophies. My research promotes the conclusion that although Virginia Woolf and Katherine Anne Porter were uncomfortable with the feminism of their day, they were both postmodern feminist visionaries.

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S "OLD MORTALITY" AND VIRGINIA WOOLF: A STUDY IN FEMINISM

INTRODUCTION

Katherine Anne Porter was strongly devoted to questioning society's prescriptions for female behaviour. Porter's personal conduct demonstrated a powerful independence, but her writing stands as the greatest example of her efforts for women's liberation.[1] It is no coincidence that one of Katherine Anne Porter's favourite novels was written by arguably one of the most important feminists of the twentieth century - Virginia Woolf.[2] She wrote in her notes for her review of Woolf's The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays:

> It is thirty-five years since I read her first novel, "The Voyage Out". She was one of the writers who touched the real life of my mind and

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[1] Jane Flanders hints at connections between Porter and Woolf in her essay "Katherine Anne Porter's Feminist Criticism: Book Reviews from the 1920s" (Frontiers IV: 1979): 44-48. My essay expands on her suggestion. Flanders observes that Woolf "had not yet published A Room of One's Own when Katherine Anne Porter was expressing very similar opinions."

[2] In an interview with Barbara Thompson in 1963 Katherine Anne Porter said "And there are three novels that I re-read with pleasure and delight - three almost perfect novels, if we're talking about form you know. One is A High Wind in Jamaica by Richard Hughes, one is A Passage To India by E.M. Forster, and the other is To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf." Quoted from Thompson's "Katherine Anne Porter: An Interview" cited in Joan Givner's Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1987):89.

feeling very deeply; I had from that book the same sense of some mysterious revelation of truth. . .[3]

The themes of a young woman's self-discovery and the confines of the masculinist culture for women present in The Voyage Out are also focal themes for Porter's writings.

Porter wanted to write from a very young age. Born in Indian Creek, Texas, in 1890 she wrote her way out of her southern farmer's daughter world and into journalism and the city of Denver. From the late 1920s onwards after an inspirational period in Mexico, her subtle but powerful stories began to attract attention from magazines, and in 1930 her first collection Flowering Judas was published. Porter's fictional literary accomplishments during her life include collections of stories such as "Hacienda" (1934); "Noon Wine" (1937); Pale Horse Pale Rider (1939); The Leaning Tower and Other Stories (1944); Old Order (1955); A Christmas Story (1965); and her only novel Ship of Fools (1962). In 1979 many of her best stories were reprinted in The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter, which won the National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize. The stories which featured the protagonist "Miranda" were soon to be

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[3] In K.A.P's notes held in the collection of notes and letters held at the Archives and Manuscripts Department, McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park. Series II, box 7. Many of the notes and letters reproduced in this thesis have grammatical and spelling errors, and some of the pieces are undated.

known as her "Miranda stories." The protagonist Miranda appears in the stories contained in The Old Order(1955) and Pale Horse, Pale Rider(1939), and it is in these tale that we can most often see Porter's likeness to Woolf in expressing discontent with patriarchal strictures. Also like Woolf she wrote non-fiction and essays, for example, My Chinese Marriage (1921), Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts (1922) and an incomplete study of the Puritan Cotton Mather. Although we do not have a published diary as in the case of Woolf, we do have evidence of Porter's prolific personal writing which took the form of letters and notes.[4]

In the 1990s both Woolf and Porter have been reviewed and re-evaluated, after having been dismissed or ignored by radical feminists of the 1970s who tended to consider Woolf and Porter too bourgeois and complacent in their gender views. One feminist who speaks disparagingly of Woolf's association with feminism is Elaine Showalter, who, in A Literature of One's Own, accuses Woolf of not making a forceful feminist statement in her work.[5] She argues that

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[4] Kept in the Mckeldin Library, University of Maryland.

[5] Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing,(Princetown, New Jersey: Princetown University Press,1977). Another seventies feminist who dismisses Woolf's work is Kate Millett. In her famous work Sexual Politics (Garden City New York: Doubleday and Co.Inc, 1970:139) she gives only one sentence to the work of Woolf including this statement: "Virginia Woolf glorified two housewives, Mrs Dalloway and Mrs Ramsay.

Woolf's implicit gender goal of androgyny was "a myth that helped her [Woolf] evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition" (264). To Woolf the desirable state of androgyny meant also the achievement of harmony and liberation for both sexes. This view is expressed most overtly in her work Orlando, which explores the feelings and experiences of a character who mysteriously changes sexes through the ages.

In the excellent introductory chapter of Toril Moi's work Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory entitled "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf," Moi sums up Showalter's reaction to Woolf thus:

> For Showalter . . . Woolf's greatest sin against feminism was that "even in the moment of expressing feminist conflict, Woolf wanted to transcend it. Her wish for experience was really a wish to forget experience."[6]

Not all critics agree with Showalter's reading of Woolf. Jane Marcus goes to considerable lengths to argue just how forceful in feminist terms Woolf really is: "Writing for Virginia Woolf was a revolutionary act . . . A guerilla

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[6] Moi is quoting Showalter from her chapter "Virginia Woolf and the flight into androgyny " in her work A Literature of Their Own: 282. Toril Moi, "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Feminist Readings of Woolf," in Sexual /Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory (New York: Routledge, 1985): 2.

fighter in a Victorian skirt, she trembled with fear as she prepared her attacks, her raids on the enemy."[7] Marcus's insistence on Woolf's eligibility as a revolutionary feminist has produced a new feminist canon of criticism. Feminist work on Woolf over the last decade has "produced a ruling definition of feminism implicated in and often inseparable from its understanding of Woolf as a revolutionary."[8] Bette London in her article "Guerrilla in Petticoats or Sans-Culotte? Virginia Woolf and the Future of Feminist Criticism" describes the feminist groups who have discussed Woolf in relation to Feminism. She cautions feminist critics:

> I want to ask not whether that centre (Woolf) can hold but whether we as feminist critics can afford to continue to hold onto it. I pose my question in terms borrowed from practitioners of a very different, but also highly influential, strand of contemporary feminism - in the speculative and theoretical terms articulated by Teresa de Lauretis in her recent call for feminist self-assessment, for an interrogation of the "role of

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[7] Jane Marcus, "Thinking Back Through Our Mothers" in her edited work New Feminist Essays On Virginia Woolf (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1981): 1.

[8] Bette London "Guerrilla in Petticoats or sans-Culotte? Virginia Woolf and the Future of Feminist Criticism" Diacritics Summer/Fall 1991: 13.

> feminist studies in the production, reproduction and transformation of social discourses and knowledges."

London rehearses the current concerns about feminism's tendency to homogenise the definition of feminism and calls for an internal investigation. By demonstrating the broad range of feminist positions on Woolf, London powerfully advocates that these differences between feminists are important because otherwise feminism would present itself detrimentally as a homogenous whole:

> It might be at such moments that we most need to maintain our internal differences - to insist on differences within and between women, within and between feminisms. If we must continually "rescue" Woolf, if we continue to need her name to stake our identity, it may be that we need her as a figure about whom to disagree. Certainly, we need to consider the costs of assuming Woolf as our natural territory. Otherwise we risk making "Woolf" a code word for a consensus that masks the homogenizing efforts that reduce feminism to one meaning.[9]

London's concerns for the feminist study of Woolf situate her in postmodern school of feminist thought which holds

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[9] London: 27.

dear the importance of plurality, multiplicity and difference. Postmodern feminism opposes the idea that feminism should be unified by any single dogma or indeed that it be allowed to promote any one "reading" of texts. Postmodernist feminists feel that to provide only one explanatory theory of women's oppression is to be guilty of straightjacketing "women," opening this "feminism" to the same charges as patriarchy. London places the positive emphasis on steering away from a feminist consensus and instead calls for a more individualized approach to interpreting women's experiences. London's pertinent discussion of the Woolf debates provides a framework through which to view Porter.

In the course of this essay I will look at the version of feminism that Katherine Anne Porter conveyed through her writings, focusing in particular on the short story "Old Mortality," and compare this version of feminism to that in the work of Virginia Woolf. In viewing these two female authors alongside each other one notices the striking similarity: that both these women are anomalies in their time chiefly because they succeeded in winning the struggle to cultivate their writing talents in a "female-hostile" literary era. Woolf was seen as an eccentric bluestocking and Porter a strange oxymoron, a Southern belle with literary talent. It is possible to draw a number of

comparisons between the two women who were considered avant-garde feminists of the early twentieth century. For instance, Woolf and Porter shared a strong interest in women's rights, yet significantly both of them over time became disillusioned with the feminist political movement. Woolf's and Porter's feminism manifests itself through their personal lives and writings rather than public activism. There are many similarities too in the feminist treatment of both these authors over the century.

Initially and until the emergence of the women's movement of the 1960s Woolf and Porter were heralded as female heroes and championed for having managed to invade the male literary canon. The tide of popularity changed in the 1960s and 1970s in accordance with the new wave of radical feminist critics who found Porter and Woolf wanting (to various degrees) in serious feminist commitment. The controversy surrounding Woolf's credibility as a feminist at this time is comparable in one sense to the feminist literary appraisal of Porter's work. Like Woolf's writings, Porter's work had been dismissed by feminists (note the absence for many years of any feminist critique of her work) for lacking sufficient feminist potency in her art. In the last decade or so, Porter (like Woolf) has been rediscovered by critics such as Margaret Bolsterli, Jane Flanders, Jane Krause Demouy, and Darlene Harbour Unrue, Janis Stout and

Vanashree, who consider her (also like Woolf) as having a "revolutionary-feminist" edge to her work.[10] These critics have added an important contribution to the already well-established body of general literary criticism. The more recent readings of Porter's work which recognize her value to feminism provide an impressive alternative approach to her fiction, differing from the previous attention which by and large concentrated primarily on Porter's magnificent style and skill as a short story writer. Now finally both Woolf and Porter have been rescued, re-instated, and elevated to a position even higher than before by postmodern feminists such as Julia Kristeva, the French feminist philosopher and author.

It is necessary, however, to acknowledge that there are significant differences between the two authors. For instance, they come from different continents and backgrounds. Woolf, born into an established London family in 1882, lost her mother at the age of thirteen. It was an

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[10] Bolsterli, "Bound Characters in Porter, Welty and McCullers: The Pre-Revolutionary status of Women in American Fiction" Bucknell Review XXV, Spring 1978; Flanders, "Katherine Anne Porter's Feminist Criticism: Book Reviews from the 1920's" Frontiers iv No.2 1979. Demouy, Katherine Anne Porter's Women: The Eye of her Fiction (Austin: Texas University Press, 1983); Unrue, Truth and Vision in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985); Stout, Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter and Joan Didion (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990); Vanashree, Feminine Consciousness in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House 1991).

intellectual family that valued education and encouraged Virginia in her studies. Woolf played a key role in the Bloomsbury Group which met and discussed moral and ethical matters of the day. However, from an early age it became clear to those who knew her that she had a sensitive disposition which took a toll on her health, particularly after the death of her mother, stepsister, brother and father. She married at the relatively late age of thirty but had no children. Her close relationship with Vita Sackville West invited speculation about her sexuality. A deterioration of her mental health can be charted throughout her life, she suffered from periodic nervous breakdowns and eventually drowned herself in the River Ouse in 1941.

Porter, eight years younger than Woolf, was born into a family of unstable fortunes in rural Texas in 1890. Porter's mother also died when she was a child (under two) but, unlike the Stephenses, her family suffered financial insecurity that caused them to move on a regular basis. A modest farming family background and education was not the main focus, which may be why Porter escaped by means of marriage at the first opportunity, aged nineteen. Porter married many times and had many male lovers and, also like Woolf, had no children. She was a paradox: Southern Belle on the one hand and ruthless, aspiring, independent woman on the other. Woolf did not need to work, but Porter trained

as a journalist and consequently had a strong interest in international affairs. She was in Mexico during the retrenchment after the revolution ended in 1920, in Germany when the Nazis were beginning to gain power, and in Paris with other expatriates in the thirties.

Woolf and Porter's different personalities and literary experiences inevitably result in specialized styles particular to their individual psychological states. Woolf's fiction is primarily in the novel form, and she is noted for her development of what is now known as "stream of consciousness" writing. Porter, on the other hand, writes mainly short stories which are tightly and tersely constructed - very different from the fluid style of Woolf. Furthermore, unlike Woolf, Porter did not write any non-fiction feminist essays such as Three Guineas for public readership.[11] Porter's "feminism" was never overt or prescriptive in her fiction; in fact, she shied away from the label "feminist."[12] While I acknowledge that there are

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[11] Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas (Harvard: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich,1963).

[12] Porter's personal involvement with the feminist movement is documented by her biographer Joan Givner in Katherine Anne Porter: A Life (New York: Touchstone Books) 1981. A letter addressed to Porter from her brother, dated March 23, 1909, implies a response to a letter she sent him containing feminist arguments for the vote. Porter apparently also sang songs with feminist overtones on the Lyceum circuit and expressed vocal resentment of anti-feminist church fathers and priests (Givner Life:101, 110, 461). In later life, though when questioned about her views on the women's movement, she rejected the label "feminist". In reply to

differences between Porter and Woolf, I believe their similarities are more important because these female writers stand out in a modernist era for their remarkable and incisive postmodern feminist vision of the liberated self, unfettered by the dogma associated with the body of "feminism." The similarities and not the differences will therefore be the focus of this essay.

This essay will endeavour to offer a way of looking at Katherine Anne Porter through the lens of Virginia Woolf and postmodernist feminism. After a close reading of "Old Mortality" and some critical commentary on Woolf and Porter demonstrating their related perspectives, Porter's dialogue with her contemporaries, as represented by the figure of the "New Woman," will be used to help contextualize Porter's stance. Finally, I will show, with the help of Julia Kristeva's feminist schemata, the feminist position that I believe Porter and Woolf occupy. I hope to demonstrate that textually, contextually, and structurally, Porter is a self-conscious, significant feminist writer by her own definition.

Maurice Dolbier's question "You're no crusading feminist then?" in the 1962 interview entitled "I've had a good run for my money" Porter answered emphatically "No"!, cited in Givner Conversations: 77. Critics have surmised that she did not want to associate with the aggressive manliness of the feminist image.

CHAPTER I

ANGRY WOMEN: A CASE FOR WOOLF AND PORTER

Katherine Anne Porter and Virginia Woolf wrote at a time when definitions of "feminism" were first being formed and hotly debated. Jane Flanders emphasizes the fact that "Porter clearly intended to manifest her own feminism not by writing propaganda, but by maintaining the independence of a modern woman and by recording the experience as accurately as possible."[13] In letters, however, Porter does not show the reserve exhibited in her fiction on the woman question. In a letter written to a friend Mrs Ethel Clausen in May 1950 she expresses her affinity with Woolf's personal anger towards men and the patriarchy. In the following passage she describes her feelings about Virginia Woolf's feminist tracts Three Guineas and A Room of One's Own and their critical reception by the male literary establishment. Referring to these two polemical works by Woolf she notes:

> . . . the resentment they rouse in the bosoms of even the best and most generous of men, even her most devoted critics among the other sex . . .

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[13] Flanders: 45.

Such wrath, I thought probably comes from one of two things: a sense of guilt, or a sense of unjust accusation. I made one discovery. Men (this is the safest generalization that I know) do not in the least object to a woman having money. They themselves for their own good reasons devised the whole system of inheritance which is also careful of the daughters. What they cannot endure, and never intended is for her to have the use and control of it. Almost the first thing she does with her financial freedom is to get a room of her own (symbolically or literally) with a good stout lock and key to the door. This undermines all life, the whole mystical sacred muddle of the relations between the sexes. It is almost unbearable to them - by them I mean men, of course, and this is rash, for I haven't got the opinions of more than half a hundred reasonably intelligent men on the subject. They were however, in extraordinary unanimity on the question. It boiled down to this: Women should not have any interest or pursuit which removes them from the natural dominance and discipline of men. The first right of men, the very etc of their manhood, is to have their interests and

> pursuits entirely removed and free from any threat of invasion or participation by women . . . with the natural corresponding right to have the full use of women's entire time, thought and service, at such times as are convenient.[14]

The letter demonstrates that Porter agreed emphatically with Woolf on the subject of the male establishment and its limitations on women. Porter bitterly surmises that the crux of the subordination of women rests on the economic structure "devised" by men. She pinpoints the reason for the hostile reaction to Woolf's A Room of One's Own as stemming from men's "guilt" or sense of "unjust accusation." Furthermore, Porter directs a scathing attack on men who are terrified of women who have their own room, lock and key. She also critiques the philosophy underpinning patriarchy which insists that sexual separation is to work only one way - in the favour of men. Clearly then from this letter we can conclude that Porter felt the inequalities of patriarchy and vehemently denounced them. Additional evidence of Porter's views can be found in some undated personal notes she wrote on Woolf:

> I liked her healthy outspoken anger at the nonsense that is talked and written about women, at the perverse exclusions and limitations and

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[14] K.A.P. notes, Mckeldin Library, Series II, box 7.

> obstructions they are obliged to face merely in trying to carry out their natural destinies, and I always much admired her refusal to be sweet, or tactful, or even patient about it.[15]

So for Porter, unlike Showalter, Woolf is angry in a positive way and not at all flaccid in her feminist expression as Showalter maintains. Porter applauds the importance of measuring the female efforts of the 1920s woman's rights movement in their own social and cultural framework. It is, therefore, necessary to question Showalter's 1970s feminist perspective on Woolf and avoid using the 1970s feminist measuring stick to devalue the early sisters' efforts.

Porter obviously shares Woolf's "outspoken anger" yet this anger was never overtly apparent in her fiction.[16] Indeed paradoxically, in "Old Mortality" Porter seems critical of the character Eva who represents angry feminism through her identification with the suffragist movement. An ambivalent relationship with the feminist movement provides another common ground between the two authors, for Woolf

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[15] K.A.P. notes, McKeldin Library, Series II, box 7.

[16] The Collected Essays and Occasional Writings of Katherine Anne Porter (Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence, 1970): 68-71 contains a letter from Porter to Glenway Wescott, dated March 27 1939 which records Porter's admiration for Woolf thus: "What is more she, like Hardy lived outside dogmatic belief."

believed that anger should not be allowed to interfere with the creation of art.

Flanders' words about Porter's "not writing propaganda but . . . maintaining the independence" of a modern woman to "record the experience as accurately as possible," echo the sentiments expressed in Woolf's essay "Women and Fiction." Woolf's essay examines the great change in women's fiction during the Fin-de-Siecle asserting that the woman writer should no longer be bitter and angry. She proposes that the time is now coming when a woman's "writing will have little or no foreign influence to disturb it. She will be able to concentrate on her vision without distraction from outside."[17] Woolf insists that the anger and hostility which women writers undoubtedly feel, owing to the limitations imposed on them by society and their exclusion from the literary canon, is severely detrimental (if not a total barrier) to the creation of art. Woolf does not appear to be saying that anger is wrong but rather that to achieve greatness a writer must move beyond it. In her essay "Women and Fiction" she anticipates a coming age in which the female writer utilizes the unfettered sources of her imagination, free from any crippling gender bias.

To add to Woolf's own explanation of how she views her

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[17] Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction", in Granite and Rainbow (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986):80.

art as a woman, the critic Michelle Barrett comments:

> While much of her work is explicitly political in nature, and of course Three Guineas is highly polemical, she frequently resisted the intrusion of any attitude which, as she wrote to Lytton Strachey, "gets into the ink and blisters the paper" of her novels.[18]

Like Woolf, Porter also veers away from distorting her fiction into a didactic authorial monologue. Instead she allows her plots and characters to project, against a background of many other themes, her concerns for female self-actualization. Flanders and Barrett respectively defend Porter and Woolf in the midst of criticism that their version of feminism was too mild. The works were perceived by later feminists as being an insipid attack on patriarchy, judged to be deficient in polemical theme and content. While it may be true that Woolf and Porter were not so blatant in their feminist narratives as, say, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in The Yellow Wallpaper or Kate Chopin in The Awakening, their subtle forms of critique are equally powerful. These two writers are a great deal more subversive than many feminists acknowledged. This highlights the inherent problem with the concept of one

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[18] Michelle Barrett, Virginia Woolf: Women and Writing (London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979): 22, cited in Patricia Waugh's Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern, (New York: Routledge, 1989): 88.

single formulation of "feminism": it only permits one unified feminist dogma to represent women. As an alternative, recent feminists recognize the need for multiple concepts of feminism to co-exist if the path to true liberation is to be followed.

Postmodern feminists envision an enriching plurality of visions and ideologies as put forward by Judith Butler in Gender Trouble. She is a self-declared feminist although her introspective analysis of the feminist movement voices her criticism of "feminism" as a consensus. She is seemingly postmodern in her appraisal of feminism:

> There is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term **women** denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those it purports to describe and represent, **women**, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety . . . [19]

As Porter shied away from the label of "feminist" wishing instead for the autonomy to be herself, Butler is also protesting the need to be individual. Butler calls for an enquiry into the seemingly monolithic school of "feminism." She has pertinent concerns that "women," whom feminists mean

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[19] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990): xi.

to represent, are being misrepresented:

> It is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of "women," the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought . . . My suggestion is that the presumed universality and the unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the constraints of the representational discourse in which it functions . . . feminism opens itself to charges of gross misrepresentation.[20]

Butler elucidates the disadvantages women may be bringing on themselves by being shackled to a hegemonic definition of feminism. By insisting that a fixed definition of feminism serves all women, feminism puts itself dangerously in the position of imposing an identity on women in the same manner patriarchy does. This conclusion would suggest that feminism is acting counter-productively and undermining the

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[20] Butler: ix. This view returns to the argument raised by Bette London that deciding on a definitive feminist understanding of Woolf (after the creative process of debate) is as self-defeating in result by being unnecessarily restrictive and limiting as a single definitive version of feminism imposed on women.

basis of its cause. Butler thrashes out these tensions she sees within feminism. Her work offers a good perspective with which to regard writers such as Woolf and Porter who resisted the idea of being represented by the narrowly defined feminism of, say, the main trajectory of the suffragists.

It is important to understand that Porter and especially Woolf had an uncomfortable relationship with the organized feminism prevalent in the 1920s. Woolf did, in fact, write to Janet Case in 1910 saying she would be happy to address envelopes on behalf of the women's cause, but her involvement is short-lived. Both her health and her views kept her from actively participating in the war of the sexes.[21] Herbert Marder states, "As much as she sympathised with the aims of the suffragists, she could not share their enthusiasm for political action; she found something antipathetic in the idea of marching in a protest or even sitting on a committee."[22] Porter was not an active supporter of suffrage societies either. In a letter to her friend Josephine Herbst in 1930 she confided, "A feminist

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[21] Although in her diary she records the headline in a newspaper, The Referee, following the publication of The Three Guineas as having ▒a great black bar Woman declares Sex War or some such caption▒ Virginia Woolf A Writer's Diary (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co, 1953):289

[22] Herbert Marder, Feminism and Art Astudy of Virginia Woolf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968): 20

magazine in England asked for my views on that subject . . . I wrote and said I had no views on Feminism that required two thousand words . . . it was impossible for me to regard the interests of men and women as separate."[23] She was more interested in the moral issues surrounding the Sacco - Vanzetti case, two Italian immigrants who were accused of murder and condemned to death in 1921. Both Woolf and Porter drew away from feminist militancy and created suffragist characters who were objects of satire.

Porter's unflattering depiction of cousin Eva as a suffragist is not unlike Woolf's own portrayals of women who are fighting for the "cause." Porter describes Eva thus:

> Eva shy and chinless straining her upper lip over two enormous teeth would sit in corners watching her mother. She looked hungry, her eyes were strained and tired. She wore her mother's old clothes, made over and taught Latin in a female seminary. She believed in votes for women, and travelled about, making speeches.[24]

Like Porter's Eva, most of the feminists Woolf portrays in

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[23] Letter to Josephine Herbst, Series I, Box 12, KAP Collection of letters, Mckeldin Library, College Park.

[24] Katherine Anne Porter, The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972): 196. Subsequent references will be cited within the text.

her fiction have some negative aspect.[25] Evelyn Murgatroyd is the token feminist in The Voyage Out and as, Pamela Transue notes, "in her we find a sometimes caustic portrait of a feminist do-gooder which reflects Woolf's persistent mistrust of organized political activity."[26] Mary Datchet is the active feminist of Night and Day, and although Woolf is kinder to this character than to her other feminists, nevertheless Datchet's suffrage society is in many ways an object of satire. One can see the same sufferings of loneliness incurred by the isolating forces of feminism in Porter's Eva and in Woolf's Mary Datchet.

The portrait of Miss Kilman in Woolf's Mrs Dalloway is perhaps the best comparison to be made with Eva although overall Porter goes one step farther in the starkness of her feminist characters. Miss Kilman is the repressed and embittered governess to Mrs Dalloway's child; Transue summarizes that the governess, "unable to achieve power in the world of men . . . dominates and tyrannizes Elizabeth."

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[25] Lily in To The Lighthouse is unusual in being one of Woolf's more affable characters that expresses feminist sentiments but her creator makes evident in the novel that she is not without flaws. My sources for my discussion on Woolf's depiction of feminists in her works are Diane Filby Gillespie's article "Political Aesthetics: Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson" in Jane Marcus, Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 1983):132-151 and also Pamela Transue's work Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Style,(New York: State University of New York Press, 1986): 6, 22-27, 32-37, 44, 58-61, 102-107.

[26] Transue: 22 and 23.

Transue develops this idea further by saying that "although she is ostensibly an 'emancipated' woman, Miss Kilman's bitterness, fanaticism, and desire for control ally her with the controllers and exploiters."[27] Feminists like Miss Kilman and Eva in "allying themselves with the masculine tendency to convert and to impose definite solutions upon indefinite situations, were merely perpetuating the patriarchal system of power."[28] Another of the dangers Transue perceives Woolf to have felt about the feminist movement was that political arguments "were all too often simply justifications for private frustrations, thus betraying a negative egotism."[29] The following brief sketch of Miss Kilman, when compared with the already quoted description of Porter's Eva, shows some striking similarities between Porter's and Woolf's approaches to pro-woman suffrage characters:

> Miss Kilman stood on the landing, and wore a mackintosh; but she had her reasons. First it was cheap; second she was over forty; and did not after all, dress to please. . . bitter and burning. . . she looked with steady and sinister serenity. . . [she] was not going to make herself agreeable. She had always

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[27] Transue: 103.

[28] Transue, introduction: 6.

[29] Transue: 103.

> earned her living. Her knowledge of modern history was thorough in the extreme. She did out of her meagre income set aside so much for the causes she believed in.[30]

There is a sterility to both Miss Kilman and her counterpart Eva that makes both these women insufficient role models for Elizabeth and Miranda respectively. Miss Kilman and Eva are lonely pariahs of their society; having turned their back on a coexistence with men, they could be paralleled with the angry feminist separatists. The anger expressed through feminists like Eva jars the androgynous artistic sensibilities of both Woolf and Porter who believe in a less reactionary and less polemical approach.

Showalter believes that the problem with Woolf (and hence Porter) is that the androgynous position Woolf aspired to in her writing was actually Woolf's way of repressing her anger in her fiction. In an essay entitled "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as a Re-Vision" the poet and essayist Adrienne Rich (associated with seventies feminism) comments on what she reads to be Woolf's stifled tone which betrays a tightly repressed anger:

> In rereading Virginia Woolf's A Room Of One's Own (1929) for the first time in some years, I was

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[30] Virginia Woolf, Mrs Dalloway (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953): 186, 187, 190.

> astonished at the sense of effort, of pains taken, of dogged tentativeness, in the tone of that essay. And I now recognize that tone. It is a tone of a woman almost in touch with her anger, who is determined to not appear angry, who is willing herself to be calm, detached, and even charming in a roomful of men where things have been said which are attacks on her very integrity.[31]

Rich holds the entirely opposite view from Porter who "admired" Woolf for "her refusal to be sweet, or tactful, or even patient" about the limits of patriarchy.[32] Instead Rich allies herself with Showalter in the debate concerning Woolf's anger; both see her anger as negatively repressed. Perhaps the discrepancy lies in which essay or novel is being examined; Three Guineas written in 1938 is considerably more bold and angry on the surface than perhaps A Room of One's Own written almost a decade earlier. Showalter and Rich make a strong case for the necessity of anger as a stage in political transformation. Rich continues:

> And today, much poetry by women--and prose for

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[31] Adrienne Rich,"When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" (1971) in Poetry and Politics An Anthology of Essays Ed. Richard Jones (New York: Quill, 1985): 142.

[32] K.A.P. notes, Mckeldin Library, Series II, box 7.

> that matter--is charged with anger. I think we need to go through this anger, and we will betray our own reality if we try, as Virginia Woolf was trying, for objectivity, a detachment, that would make us sound more like Jane Austen or Shakespeare . . . Both the victimization and anger experienced by women are real, and have real sources, everywhere in the environment, built into society, language, the structures of thought. They will go on being tapped and explored by poets, among others. We can neither deny them, nor will we rest there. A new generation of poets is already working out of the psychic energy released when women begin to move out towards what the feminist philosopher Mary Daly has described as the "new space" on the boundaries of patriarchy.[33]

Rich sees the importance of expressing anger in order for women to feel a sense of their own valid "reality." Accordingly, Rich believes that women's anger is entirely legitimate and legitimizes their experience and existence. Rich perceives Woolf as falsely "detached" and in denial of her anger. In Rich's view Woolf's repression of anger

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[33] Rich: 153-154 (I underlined for emphasis the pertinent phrase about anger).

causes her to betray her own reality and prevents her from reaching that ultimate new territory beyond anger. This "new space" Rich refers to is a vision which I argue Woolf and Porter share, yet with different stresses. Woolf never embraced the separatist "Woman-as-Other" angry feminist doctrine, but as her novels (particularly Orlando and The Waves) suggest she was ahead of her time in anxious anticipation of the third space. Porter, on the other hand, recognizes the relevance and essentiality of anger and the importance of its replacement by a post-anger stage. Rich, however, maintains the view that the more anger the better, as it serves as the only platform from which to travel onwards to the ultimate gendered space. For Rich anger is tremendously empowering as she believes the "psychic energy" released can be harnessed and utilized for the greater good of womankind. Therefore to Rich's mind the greater the anger the more successful will be the transition through this anger to a better plane. In this sense, the anger manifest in women such as Eva and Miss Kilman **enables** the next generation represented by Miranda and Elizabeth to make precisely this move out towards the described "new space."

The turn away from anger to the new boundaries of patriarchy is hinted at throughout "Old Mortality." It is enacted perhaps most clearly in the last scene. Miranda has come to the decision to reject Eva and what she represents,

symbolically enacting it in her refusal to ride in the back seat of the car with her. "'No thank you,' says Miranda, in a firm cold voice. 'I'm quite comfortable, don't disturb yourself'" (220). The boundaries of patriarchy could be seen symbolically as the car and the coexistence of Eva and Miranda contained within the same frame as essential if Miranda is to reach her ideal destination - a rolefree individual. Porter suggests Miranda is possibly in the near post-anger stage but her self-actualization depends on her cousin Eva's simultaneous contribution.

Miranda's rejection of Eva's "angry feminism" does not make its form any less valid or important. Porter has Miranda respect the courage of Eva and the women she represents; indeed Miranda pays tribute to her cousin's efforts when she says "she felt convinced that indeed women would be voting soon if nothing fatal happened" to Eva; "there was something in her manner which said things could be safely left to her." Porter emphasises Miranda's admiration for Eva. A parallel could be drawn here with the issue Adrienne Rich touches on in her essay: the importance of the stage of anger represented by Eva's feminist stance in paving the way for the new form of feminism. Eva's anger is essential if the transformation to the third and most liberating stage of feminism is to happen. Porter needs Miranda to find Eva's feminism unattractive in order to

forge ahead into a new gender territory; however, she is not remiss in paying tribute to the valiant efforts and constructive anger of these women. In the face of Rich's and Showalter's harsh judgment that Woolf (and Porter) suffer from repressed anger, I hope to have shown a more accurate understanding of their anger and its subtle management. Woolf and Porter are not perceived as angry enough for this band of feminist critics, but in view of Woolf and Porter's enlightened vision for feminism their work stands as strong as any feminist testament in pointing the way to a better future. These authors were ahead of their time. What they surmised about the angry feminism of their day parallels Rich's retrospective realization concerning the ardent and extreme forms of seventies' feminism. Like Rich, they see angry feminism's contribution to creating a positive movement out of gender inertia. They also possess the insight to know this was only partially liberating and total liberation lay beyond, a stage further.

Woolf and Porter acknowledge through characters in their fiction the view that "angry feminism" is only one stage of the journey towards true fulfilment. They respectively imply that Miss Kilman and Eva, who have committed themselves to learning, renouncing marriage and family life, feel unfulfilled. Of Miss Kilman Woolf writes, "she had been cheated. Yes, the word has no exaggeration,

for surely a girl has some right to happiness" (Mrs Dalloway, 187). This sense of loss and denial is paralleled in the two texts in their respective suffragist characters.

In Porter's "Old Mortality" Eva's bitter tone is, according to the narrator, a "constant state of mind" (208). Miranda is "chilled by her melancholy" when Eva advises her that "your mind outwears all sorts of things you may set your heart upon; you can enjoy it when all other things are taken away" (210). Later Miranda views Eva with the same eye with which her creator probably viewed the suffragists of her time: "It was a dreary prospect; why was a strong character so deforming? Miranda felt she truly wanted to be strong, but how could she face it, seeing what it did to one?" (215) Miranda is left at the end of the story wanting to make her own space in which to exist. She admires Eva for campaigning but only feels "dimly fired for the cause herself," observing that Eva's choice to live as a pariah was not without its penalties (210). The matching conclusion that both Porter and Woolf appear to have come to is that a space of one's own is beneficial to a woman but not to the extent that a woman isolates herself completely, resenting the opposite sex and withdrawing into her own unhappy lot. Porter and Woolf both strive for that "new space," as a place to aim for after all the anger and bitterness have been worked through. In many instances in

these authors' fiction it is evident that they are still struggling with their own anger but that they both can see an alternative space beyond it.

It is helpful to see Porter's and Woolf's feminist qualities as similar even though their work and artistic personalities are markedly different. Thus, Jane Flanders' assessment of Porter is equally applicable to Woolf:

> In content and form, Porter's essays and fiction demonstrate her faith in the written word as the signification of a woman's struggling sense of selfhood. They show her outrage and exasperation with conventional social patterns, especially male dominated marriage and the creed of domesticity, sexual repression (which she saw as primarily crippling to women), and the pronouncements of self-appointed authorities of both sexes devoted to the status quo. She praises women who resist pressures to curb their nature, assert their opinions, defy parents, take lovers, educate themselves, and have courage and self-awareness to give shape to their experience of writing.[34]

The female characters in "Old Mortality" are all women who have strong independent characters with a mixture of masculine and feminine traits. The grandmother, Amy,

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[34] Flanders: 45.

Miranda and Eva all to a certain extent have what Virginia Woolf describes as a "little mannishness in their girlish hearts." They are forceful and domineering: they use and speak their sharp minds as opposed to being traditionally feminine by being meek and mild, virtuous and subservient.

The Victorian cult of domesticity and the ideal of southern womanhood were for the women of Porter's fiction in direct conflict with their inner desires to express themselves freely. Each of these southern women has to struggle, like the Victorian womewn of Woolf's experiences, against the roles of womanhood imposed on them by the patriarchal order. As Anne Goodwyn Jones explains:

> The idea of southern womanhood specifically denies the self. In that the southern woman is not alone, it has much in common with the ideas of the British Victorian lady and of true womanhood. All deny woman the authentic selfhood; all enjoin that woman should suffer and be still; all show woman sexually pure, pious deferment to external authority and their content with their place in the home.[35]

It would seem that Porter's and Woolf's experiences have a great deal in common and they shared the struggle for selfhood, united in their battle. In a letter to her friend

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[35] Anne Goodwyn Jones, Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South 1859 -1936 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1981): 4.

Mrs Clausen, dated May 20, 1950, Porter wrote glowingly about Woolf:

> Its a great pity, I never did meet her. Living in Europe mostly in france for more than six years, I never got to England. This is a much emptier and colder world without that sly subtle sense of comedy and that brilliant intelligence which played about a subject like lightening round a steeple. And she struck sparks from a whole row of steeples with her "Room of One's Own" and "Three Guineas." I could see nothing but the most sublime commonsense in either of these books ...[36]

Porter demonstrates in this letter her genuine and wholehearted admiration for Woolf, notably referring to Woolf's best known works centring on sexual inequalities. Porter's letter implies that she was chiefly in awe of Woolf's ability to create "sparks" within the male literary establishment as well Woolf's mercurial dexterity of mind.

Vanashree, the author of Feminine Consciousness in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction, makes this illuminating comparison between Porter and Woolf in the pages of his introduction:

> reference to the marked features in the fiction of Virginia Woolf also intends to reveal their common

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[36] K.A.P. notes, McKeldin Library, Series II, box 7.

> interest in the suffering of the feminine being, the awakening of the perception of herself as a unique individual and a resentment and refusal to be buffeted around by male opinion (other-directed), embodied in the social system.[37]

Vanashree incisively articulates the two authors' raison d'etre -- "the awakening of the perception of herself as a unique individual."

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[37] Vanashree,: vii.

CHAPTER II

STRUGGLE FOR SELFHOOD

"Old Mortality" is a story of growth and understanding: it could be described as a bildungsroman as it traces Miranda's development from childhood to young adult. Porter places particular emphasis on Miranda's ability to read for herself the truth from the stories and legends she hears about her family, especially the early death of her beautiful Aunt Amy. Reading the "truth" from the family legends is part of Miranda's own course of self-discovery and self-definition. This quasi-autobiographical plot is about, amongst other things, the intense desire to break free from the complex family web of relationships and binding identities.

The story opens with a description of Aunt Amy's photograph and reference to the attached "sad, pretty story from old times." Miranda is eight and together with her older sister Maria curiously and quietly observes their grandmother's twice-a-year habit of looking and grieving over the keepsakes of the Aunt Amy era. Through the young girl Miranda we share the story passed down about Aunt Amy's

life. The living memories surrounding Aunt Amy "enchanted the little girls," and the whole first part, "1885-1902," oscillates between the stories that the eight-year-old Miranda has pieced together about her family's past and her encounters and reflections upon events happening in the present. In the second part "1904," Miranda is now ten and a spirited pupil at a New Orleans convent school. A trip to the races brings a chance meeting with her uncle Gabriel and his new wife. The reader senses Miranda's maturing perceptions of the people and events which surround her, as she makes her own adjusted readings of Miss Lucy's horserace triumph and Uncle Gabriel's situation. This part also reveals more of Miranda's burgeoning desires for independence and freedom to be what she chooses--she flouts traditional female expectations by wanting to be a jockey. "1912" heads the final part, and we travel with the twenty-two year old Miranda on a train back to her grandmother's homestead to Uncle Gabriel's funeral. By chance she enters the compartment which carries her cousin Eva who is also returning for the funeral. Eva shares another version of the Aunt Amy story. Miranda's journey home produces more narratives woven around the main one. As we finish hearing about Amy's struggle for selfhood from Eva we learn of Miranda's flight from family and husband and "search for something new." "Old Mortality" concludes with the defiant

Miranda rejecting her family's stories because the search for truth seemed so difficult to extract from "other people's memory of the past."

The blurred boundaries between reality and fiction and authorship and self appear as chief concerns from the moment the narrative begins. The young girls yearn to hear their grandmother tell the story of Aunt Amy over again, as though the more they hear it the more it will become a part of them. They reconstruct the stories, appropriating what they have heard for themselves, "all ears all eager minds, picking here and there among the floating ends of narrative, patching together as well as they could fragments of tales . . . " (176). They busily knit together their own version of Amy and events, claiming their own part in the living story, for to the girls "Aunt Amy was as real as the pictures in the old Holbein and Durer books were real" (178).

The interlocking nature of "the Amy story" and Miranda's development is an important theme which runs throughout the three parts of "Old Mortality." An element of identification takes place on several levels between Miranda and Amy. Both young women are developing their sense of self and adult persona. Both struggle to resist their family's and society's pressures to form them. Amy cannot accept her ascribed role as genteel daughter, wife and southern belle, and as a consequence she dies. She does

not want to marry Gabriel and settle down, which her family and Gabriel are pressing her to do; her grandmother tells her "that marriage and children would cure her of everything" (182).

The story implies that Amy wants "a good dancing partner" (183), with the egalitarian freedoms that implies, not a husband who will own her. Gabriel's adoration suffocates her, and as a way of expressing her control over herself (and opposition to him) she cuts off the hair that he has complimented and admired. With this gesture Amy is killing "the angel of the house," destroying any semblance of complicity with the male gaze and order. It is interesting to note that although she refutes Gabriel's opinion, she does turn to her brothers for affirmation as to her appearance on the night of the ball. "If **they** found fault in any way, she would change her dress or her hair until they were pleased. . . but she would not listen to her father, nor Gabriel" (183). This interior monologue suggests that Amy is not entirely free from the socialized condition of wanting male approval, though only that of her brothers seems to matter. It may be because her brothers are the men least threatening to her in the story; they do not have any authorized power over her, unlike a father or a husband. Perhaps also she has in her mind feminized them and forged a more sisterly relationship with them, whereas

she seems to have recoiled fiercely from her father's strong view of the female image. Nevertheless, she rids herself of the compliant "self" manifested in her long hair which Gabriel admires and she "would not let it grow again, not even to please her brothers" (183). After she has got rid of any male imposed constructions of "self," though, she is left with the question of what self remains--the feeling Woolf describes after having thrown her ink pot and killed the angel in her famous essay.[38] Amy, in casting off false social roles and apparently killing this angel, is not fulfilled, for the rejection of the "angel" leaves an absence. As Patricia Waugh comments, Woolf realized that simply killing the angel was not going to lead to the true self:

> The angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object--a young woman in a bedroom with an ink pot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of that falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is herself? I mean what is a woman?[39]

Amy's confusion about who she is resonates in her bouts of fever; after one long fever she capitulates and marries

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[38] Woolf, "Professions for Women" in Killing the Angel in the House: Seven Essays (London: Penguin, 1995).

[39] Woolf, "Professions for Women": 5.

Gabriel. Her sudden, surprising decision to marry and her certain prophesy of death indicate perhaps that she has given up trying to find her freedom in the living world. Showalter suggests that Mrs. Ramsay in Woolf's To the Lighthouse dies in order to seek the ultimate sanctum she cannot achieve while living--a room of her own--and Amy has done the same thing. Amy has escaped to the only place she could be sure of--a "room of her own," her grave.

Despite the family's eulogising of Amy, Miranda at a young age is not deluded by their impressions. Her family uses Amy as a benchmark of beauty and femininity by which to judge the rest of the women in the family. Amy may be the family's established role model, but Miranda intuits the painful reality of Amy's frustrated life and sees plainly why her role is not to be followed. Miranda's vision of truth occurs when she is at the races with her sister and father watching her uncle Gabriel's horse win. Porter's objections to the patriarchal roles imposed on women are best traced in the scene in which Miranda faces the real price of Miss Lucy's victory in the race:

> Miss Lucy was bleeding at the nose, two thick red rivulets were stiffening her tender mouth and chin, the round velvet chin that Miranda thought the nicest kind of chin in the world. Her eyes were wild and her knees were trembling, and she snored when she took a deep

> breath. Miranda stood staring. That was winning too. Her heart clinched tight; that was winning, for Miss Lucy. So instantly and completely did her heart reject that victory . . . (199)

The cost of Miss Lucy's winning is too much for Miranda to bear. Miss Lucy's race parallels the damaging consequences Amy encounters in her "bid for victory." Her victory in escaping the entrapment of female gender roles comes only after debilitating illness that allowed her to win by dying. Compare here the state of Miss Lucy after the race and Amy after she returned from her illicit wild ride to the border: "It was a three days' journey, and when they arrived Amy had to be lifted from the saddle. She was really ill by now, but in the gayest of humors . . . " (189) Her failing health is the price she pays to attain the ultimate freedom from social restrictions, something Amy achieves only in death.

Amy and Miranda both make attempts to possess their "selves" and thus gain a sense of autonomy. Amy seeks her freedom from role assignment in death, while Miranda, in the story's final lines, asserts that she alone has the access to her "story": "at least I know the truth about what happens to me" (221). This naiveté is on a par with Amy's delusion that somehow as a heroine she has control over who she can be in the novel: "and if I am to be the heroine of

this novel, why shouldn't I make the most of it?" (189). Amy and Miranda are Porter's vehicles for expressing her belief in the possibility of a woman being her own narrator. Implicit in Porter's depictions of these characters is a wry acknowledgment of the immense difficulties women face in actually achieving this "self-narration" in society. The realization of the self is a central theme in both "Old Mortality" and in Woolf's work. As Barbara Carson observes, Porter's women search for the prize she calls a "valid selfhood":[40]

> [I]f the words are vague, the concept is not. At its center are the recognition and use of one's own powers and abilities even in the face of custom, the discovery of truth for oneself (including the truth of one's own desires), and the strength to face that truth and act from that basis. It is in short, the creation of an essence for oneself through self-initiated actions, rather that the passive acceptance of the role assigned by others.[41]

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[40] Barbara Harrell Carson uses this term in "Winning: Katherine Anne Porter's Women," in Arlyn Diamond and Lee Edwards (eds) The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism (Amherst: University of Massachussetts Press, 1977): 239-56, quoted in Roseanne Hoefel's "The Jilting of (Hetero)sexist criticism: Porter's Ellen Weatherall and Hapsy" Studies in Short Fiction 28 (Winter, 1991): 18.

[41] Quoted in Hoefel: 18.

This concept of "self" is unattainable for Amy while she is living. It is significant that the reader's first introduction to Amy is a photograph, a "motionless image in her dark walnut frame." The containment image of the frame poignantly symbolizes the restrictions placed on Amy while she is alive and anticipates the confinement of the coffin in which her body is at a young age encased.[42] This "constriction of females" theme pervades Porter's story.

Porter is keen to emphasize that because they have internalized patriarchal influences, neither Amy nor Eva achieves ultimate "selfhood" in the course of their lives, despite their ostensible rejections of roles. Instead, Eva wins for herself only the "unhappy selfhood" found in a staunch and diligent commitment to the feminist movement. She is clearly resentful of women who have any relationships with men, and this is perhaps most markedly apparent in her tirade against Amy and girls like her who only had one thing on their minds: "'It was just sex,' she said in despair; 'their minds dwelt on nothing else'." Amy was "simply sex-ridden like the rest"(216). Eva even objects to the institution of the family which she firmly believes is "the root of all human wrongs"(217). Such extreme views could only come from someone bitter about her own experiences of

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[42] Porter would have undoubtedly read Emily Dickinson who uses the coffin as a female containment image in her poetry.

family life and her lack of success with men. This in turn is evidence that she has not been able to fend off traditional social values from affecting her outlook. Her views on marriage are reactive and thus prevent her from searching for the third space, where women can reach their goal of freedom without having to condemn themselves to a life of hostility (Eva) or death (Amy).

It is helpful to see Eva's anger in the context of Porter's view expressed in the letter to Mrs Clausen where she states that anger is a result of one of two things, "a sense of guilt" or a "sense of unjust accusation."[43] In Eva's case it is probably a little of both but mostly the latter since society has treated her unkindly for being unsuccessful on the marriage market. She feels perhaps unfairly criticised and wrongly accused of being somehow at fault for her spinster predicament, which has in turn caused her angry moralism to rise up from the grounds of neglected emotions and suppressed desires. Therefore, regardless of what she might believe, her perceived individualism or selfhood is in response to and dependent upon the opposite sex. So Eva has not in a higher sense achieved her "selfhood" as defined by Woolf and Porter. Amy also is only partially granted her selfhood in the story, as she opts for death rather than keeping up the struggle against the

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[43] K.A.P. notes, Mckeldin Library, Series II, box 7.

patriarchal ideas that a girl should marry and behave like a "proper lady." Both characters are psychologically fettered to the opposite sex: Amy in her coquettish nature which both needs and desires men's approval yet at the same time resists the obtrusiveness of the male gaze, and Eva with her essential antagonism towards them that provides her raison d'etre. Thus Eva and Amy have not attained Woolf's and Porter's state of "true selfhood," which is only found when the mind creates freely. In Porter's story the reader is given Miranda as one such hope for discovering the "truth for oneself" and creating "an essence for oneself through self-initiated actions"--returning to Carson's definition of "valid selfhood."[44]

Woolf also is deeply concerned with the existence of the "self," but while Porter conceives of the self as being an inner construction, Woolf's concept of the "self" is inextricably bound to other people's views. Therefore for Woolf, the "self" has a complicated and intertwined meaning

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[44] It is significant that Porter's choice of name for her main character has similar qualities to her Shakespearean namesake in The Tempest. Shakespeare's Miranda is also on a journey to find a new world and importantly symbolises hope and change. Porter was well grounded in the classics of literature and the intertextual reference would have been almost certainly intended. Elaine Showalter's Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) examines the way Porter and other female American writers have appropriated and revised Shakespeare's character Miranda "in thinking about their relationship to patriarchal power, language, female sexuality, and creativity": 27

since the construction of the "self" is subject to the multiperspectives of others. Mrs Ramsay in To the Lighthouse, for example, is created in the image of those who perceive her in the story. She is presented to the reader through other characters' eyes; there is no part of the novel written from her point of view. Characters who orbit around her, such as Mr Ramsay, Lily, Cam, and James refract aspects of Mrs Ramsay's "self," and these perspectives combined present the reader with Mrs Ramsay's "self" as a unified whole. It may also suggest that Woolf is probing the idea that women of her time had to be all things to all people leaving them with little or none of what they might call their own "self." James Naremore in The World Seen Without a Self discusses this feeling of selflessness which Woolf's characters so frequently experience and which her narrators often manifest.[45] Being a wife, mother, and hostess among other roles abnegates any independent centre or "essence of oneself" a woman might have. Lily is granted her vision at the end of To The Lighthouse precisely because she has rejected the "female" roles presented to her. Nancy Topping Bazin points out that although Lily recognizes Mrs Ramsay's excellence in the traditional roles of wife, mother, and hostess, she also

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[45] James Naremore, The World Without a Self: Virginia Woolf and the Novel (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

perceives and resists Mrs Ramsay's belief that to be normal Lily must likewise excel in those roles and those roles only. Bazin continues by saying "Lily tries to avoid playing the feminine role illustrated by Mrs Ramsay" and prefers instead "like Katherine Hilbery and Clarissa Dalloway" to seek "a new way of relating to men, one which allows her to maintain her own dignity and individuality."[46] Lily wishes to experience her own vision and does so in the course of the novel.

Lily resents the way of viewing things imposed on her by society, just as Miranda in Porter's story resents her family for denying her the "right to look at the world with her own eyes"(219). Society's refusal to let a woman "see" is a concern which these female novelists share; for Woolf and Porter it is analogous to their experience of the patriarchal literary canon, prohibiting women from creating freely.

Amy, it seems, has an inescapable role to play (and by inference Porter does too), yet she does manage partially to thwart it; she as self-realized heroine of the story rejects her role by dying and thus not carrying out the traditional marriage plot. Suzanne Jones writes in "Reading the Endings in Katherine Anne Porter's 'Old Mortality'" that "Porter

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[46] Nancy Topping Bazin, Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973): 128, 129.

rejects the traditional marriage plot and the traditional quest plot, viewing both as narrow options for women."[47] Amy tries to avoid the institution of marriage, preferring instead to run wild on horseback with her brother and live a life of unrestrained freedom. She refuses to be colonized by Gabriel's courting. Her response to Gabriel's gifts, which signal that she is always in his thoughts, is adamant--she asserts, "that's no place for me" (182). Amy does not want to occupy any male space, including Gabriel's head. She resists the trappings and effusions of his love, refusing to bow to the conventional pressures for a woman to wed; "she could not imagine wanting to marry anybody" (183). Although she does ultimately marry him, the happy ending is still undermined. In Amy's discussion with her grandmother about the wedding dress, it is made clear that Amy is already aware that this marriage will be her "funeral"--which it inevitably becomes, Amy dying only six weeks after the wedding.

Miranda hears two conflicting accounts of her aunt Amy's death. The story she grows up believing and hearing again and again is told to her when she is a young girl in the first part of "Old Mortality." Miranda and her sister Maria had heard the "sad, pretty story from old times"; they

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[47] Suzanne W. Jones, "Reading the Endings in Katherine Anne Porter's 'Old Mortality'" Southern Quarterly 31 (Spring, 1993): 30.

were told how Amy "had been beautiful, much loved, unhappy and had died young"(173). This is the romantically tragic version propagated by her grandmother and father, who explain that Amy died from a lung haemorrhage. Later on, however, in the third and final part of the story when Miranda and her cousin Eva discuss Amy on the train, Miranda learns that Eva has a different assessment as to how and why Amy died. She makes the conjecture that Amy was already carrying a child when she married Gabriel which was not his but a previous lover's. Eva implies that Amy dies as a result of trying to self-induce an abortion or as a result of suicide because she could not face the consequences of her situation. The accurate reasons for Amy's death are never made clear, leaving the reader in much the same position as Miranda at the end of the story - not knowing the truth of the past.

Esim Erdim points out that Amy was engaged in a desperate search for an identity different from the one assigned to her.[48] Erdim quotes Barbara Carson, who writes of Amy that "finally, unwilling to live on other people's terms and unequipped to alter the emptiness of her

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[48] Esim Erdim, "The Ring or the Dove: The New Woman in Katherine Anne Porter's Fiction," in Maria Diedrich and Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, (eds) Women and War, (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1990): 51-67.

existence, she chose simply to make that emptiness final."[49] Here we can draw a parallel with the heroine Rachel Vinrace of Woolf's The Voyage Out, who also dies shortly after marrying. Pamela Transue interprets Rachel's fate this way:

> Woolf may have elected to kill her heroine rather than sentence her to a life of disillusionment . . . by having Rachel die, she can attenuate her message about traditional marriage and its limitations by placing it in the larger context of pondering the meaning of individual life against the background of life and death . . . in the treatment of Rachel's death, Woolf manages to convey with considerable subtlety a major feminist dilemma. Marriage, even with so enlightened a partner as Terence, is too bound by tradition to accommodate the kind of change that Rachel's feminist vision demands. Feminism has expanded Rachel's horizon; marriage necessarily contracts it.[50]

Both Rachel and Amy die in order to escape the plot of marriage and romance, in the desperate manner of nineteenth century heroines who are offered no other choice. Rosemary Hennessey, in her article "Katherine Anne Porter's Model for Heroines," agrees with the view that Porter subverts the traditional space for women common to most narrative plots.

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[49] Erdim: 56.

[50] Transue: 32, 33.

She writes, "Porter challenges old myths which have shaped the image of fictional heroines in the past. From this readjustment of literary convention emerge innovative images of transcendence and authenticity for women." Furthermore the heroine Miranda is presented as one "who realizes that forfeiting romantic love is the price of self knowledge."[51] Hennessey discusses "Old Mortality" in relation to the genre of bildungsroman in American literature. She notes the fact that this genre is primarily about a young man's quest for identity, for example Huckleberry Finn or Winesburg Ohio. Any plot which does involve a young girl, Hennessy argues, requires no such search for identity. Instead she is merely waiting to be discovered "by a husband who represented the fulfilment of her destiny"--otherwise termed by Hennessy as the Cinderella myth. She continues by saying:

> The young heroine[,] usually an outcast, found happiness when her true worth was discovered by the prince, who led her off to marital bliss in the land of happily ever after. Behind this conventional heroine myth lies the notion that a woman's destiny involves one to one correlation between personal fulfilment and the reproductive and nurturing functions of wife and

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[51] Rosemary Hennessy, "Katherine Anne Porter's Model for Heroines" Colorado Quarterly 25 (Spring, 1982): 315

mother.[52]

What emerges in Miranda's quest "through the positive and negative models she encounters, and in her own moments of revelation, is the subversive conclusion that for the modern Cinderella the prince must die."[53] In Miranda's case, as the reader learns at the close of the story, the prince must be divorced and escaped from if identity and self-fulfilment are to be achieved.

Just as Miranda resented and tried to avoid being controlled, Porter likewise did not want her fiction controlled by archetypal expectations or endings anticipated by the reader conditioned by magazine or romance fictions. This is why the story ends as ambiguously as it does; as Suzanne Jones notes, "Porter's ending undermines the reader's attempt to control her text."[54] It does not prescribe for the reader which character's story is the more accurate one nor whom of the family is the best role model for Miranda. In the same way Miranda is left to choose how to interpret the stories she has been told, so the story does not limit the reader's interpretation(s). Jones analyses Porter's strategy for the ending of "Old Mortality" as a challenge for the reader to be alert to the stories

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[52] Hennessy: 301.

[53] Hennessy: 302.

[54] Suzanne Jones: 40

that make the reader/self, especially those that constrict options for women. Jones continues by drawing a convincing comparison of the reader Porter creates with her text and Patrocinio Schweickart's "feminist reader," as defined in Gender and Reading. According to Schweickart, this reader "realizes that the text has the power to structure her experience" as a woman and so chooses to "take control of the reading experience" rather than to "submit to the power of the text."[55] The parallel exists in this sense with Miranda, who is encouraged to make her own reading of the family history. Jones concludes:

> Readers of "Old Mortality" are encouraged to see ideology in the narrative, whether that narrative be a product of the patriarchy or of the feminist movement. Power structures the narrative so that from the beginning we question not only the facts of the Amy legend, and by extension the mystique of the southern belle but also the politics of its use.(31)

The narrative of "Old Mortality" is intended to be ambiguous about and ambivalent towards its protagonist and main characters. Porter deliberately avoids offering any reading

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[55] Schweickart, Patrocinio P. "Reading ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading" in Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (eds) Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986): 49 as cited in Suzanne Jones: 31.

of the events or characters as definite.[56] The narrator of "Old Mortality" in this way undercuts both Eva's woman-as-victim stories and the rest of the family's woman as southern belle stories leaving room for the reader and Miranda to elicit their "own" reading.[57]

Miranda is left in a quandary, not knowing whether to choose Amy's poetic world (which eventually kills her) or Eva's path of lonely militant independence.[58] "Old Mortality" offers a hope, vested in Miranda, for casting off the restrictive gender conventions inscribed in these roles Miranda finds so unappealing. Porter gives the reader, through the character of Miranda, a glimpse of the possibility of an androgynous and autonomous self without

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[56] This is initially destabilizing for the reader, who is used to the conventional procedure of the author giving clues and answers to the reader about characters in the text. In this story the narrator exercises a different kind of power over the reader precisely by not giving the reader any definite ideas or answers. It has the potential to disorientate the reader for the positive purpose of making the reader "read" for her/himself. Another parallel may be drawn with Woolf in this respect. Woolf's multiperspective of each character she draws also enables the reader to interpret for her/himself the "true story."

[57] Suzanne Jones: 39.

[58] "Their aunt Amy belonged to a world of poetry" (175) Amy's life as it is remembered by her family is mythically and romantically described. This family constructs the Amy myth out of their own imaginative "love of legend" and they dwelt happily on stories "romantic and poetic" of their past. The glamour of her southern belle existence and her tragic death. This is perpetuated by Miranda's grandmother and father and contrasts dramatically with the account of seemingly harsh reality that Eva gives in the scene on the train.

the crippling definitions of sexual identity. Rather than choose her gender identity from the alternatives of Eva (the bitter suffragist) and Amy (the rebellious Southern belle), Miranda shows promise of an alternative space--of a more desirably liberated kind, although the ambiguous ending leaves it unclear as to whether she will reach such a space for a new female identity in the future. Porter clearly favours ambiguity with its properties of fluidity and openness to interpretation as opposed to a strict dogma or any one fixed reading. However, what can be deduced from her ambiguous story, it seems, is that this is a bildungsroman of a female in search of her "selfhood," and Porter leaves it to the reader to determine to what extent Miranda succeeds beyond the end of the story.

CHAPTER III

POSSIBILITIES AND KRISTEVA'S THIRD SPACE

In "Old Mortality," Amy, Eva, and Miranda explore the possibilities of subverting patriarchy in an attempt to achieve their selfhood. However, these explorations do not always lead to happiness. Porter and Woolf force their readers to question why their female characters' sexuality is depicted ambiguously: androgynous and/or simply turn-of-the-century modern women. With the help of a postmodern woman, Julia Kristeva, Porter, and to a lesser extent Woolf, can be seen as feminist visionaries in which hope lies in imagining a new space for women.

Porter's depictions of Amy and Miranda demonstrate her frustration with patriarchal strictures on female behaviour and self-image. An example of the male censure of females in this story is Miranda and Maria's father who "held his daughters on his knee if they were prettily dressed and well behaved, and pushed them away if they had not freshly combed their hair and nicely scrubbed fingernails"(176). Miranda grows up knowing that "there were points of beauty by which one was judged severely"; these included being tall and

having dark hair, "the darker the better," and having pale and smooth skin:

> A beauty must be a good dancer, superb on horseback, with a serene manner, an amiable gaiety tempered with dignity at all hours. Beautiful teeth and hands, of course, and over and above all this, some mysterious crown of enchantment that attracted and held the heart.(176)

These criteria of beauty are examples of the kind of patriarchal strictures placed on Miranda's and Maria's female-image. There is evidence of a recurring pattern in the family of fathers who enforce narrowly defined codes of feminine conduct on their daughters. Amy's father (Miranda's grandfather) is incensed when he sees Amy dressed in the exact costume of the shepherdess pictured on the family Dresden china plate with "the very low laced bodice" (185). He berates her for the outfit and orders her to change her appearance. Once at the dance, however, she alters the costume, making it more sexually inviting and thereby defying her father's insistence on chaste and demure attire. She is fighting her father's control over her body's image and defiantly opts for the sexualized image of beauty.

The act of balking repressive patriarchal codes of conduct and dress occurs again in "Old Mortality" when Amy

chooses a Mardi Gras dress. Amy's mother-in-law disapprovingly asks Amy whether her black and rose velvet gown for the Proteus ball "wasn't a little dashing"(192). She is implying Amy is dressing in a provocative way, unsuitable at the best of times but particularly now that she is married. Porter throws up a lot of questions about the patriarchal institution of marriage and its muting of female sexual expression and identity. Gabriel's mother is censuring Amy's dramatic and sensual choice because, presumably, it does not comply with the image of a genteel southern lady - pure and virginal. Through Amy, we see society's "Whore - Madonna" construct typified. Amy is not allowed to be read as herself, and her family is putting pressure on her to conform to the latter "type."

Again and again we are provided with instances in the text which show the damaging patriarchal strictures on female behaviour. The schoolgirl Miranda is punished for throwing "habitual tantrums" - in particular on the occasion of her math exam in the girls' convent. This outburst in which she falls to the classroom floor, refusing to get up, is viewed by her family and the convent as another instance of what Maria calls her bad disposition. Clearly this behaviour is considered undesirable by her father and the convent precisely because it is "unladylike" and does not fulfil the expected female role of meekness and

subservience.

Anne Goodwyn Jones' conclusion to Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South 1859-1936 posits the idea that southern women writers tended to concentrate on female characters who were in "contrast to the deference and compliance of the ideal southern woman." Instead their female protagonists demonstrate a "deepening sense of self" growing "stronger by speaking from and for that self." Jones cites Scarlett O'Hara among others who act on "the basis of internal direction, often at the risk of social disapproval." Jones continues:

> In contrast to symbolizing beauty as purity and fragility, as the southern lady should, these protagonists have dark eyebrows and strong bodies. Probably because their values -- free intelligence, aloneness, self-assertion -- are traditionally masculine, the physical appearance of the protagonists is often atypical, even androgynous.[59]

The majority of Woolf's and Porter's female characters are forceful, independent and autonomous women like their creators. Characters such as Miranda, the grandmother, and Aunt Amy in Porter's "Old Mortality," for example, balance both traditionally "masculine" and "feminine" traits with a stronger emphasis on the feminine, in a manner akin to

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[59] Goodwyn Jones: 354.

Woolf's idea of "woman-manly."[60]

A parallel can be drawn between Porter's and Woolf's interest in depicting androgynous characters.[61] In addition to the obvious androgynous character of Woolf's Orlando from the novel of the same name, Lily (To The Lighthouse), Rhonda (The Waves), and Clarissa Dalloway (Mrs Dalloway) also are characters which to varying degrees demonstrate a bi-sexuality of the mind.[62] As many critics have pointed out, these characters epitomize Woolf's vision of the fused masculine and feminine ego as described by Woolf in A Room of One's Own:

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[60] Woolf's "woman-manly" concept appears in A Room of One's Own: 132, 147-48. A further discussion may be found in Bazin's Chapter One entitled "A Quest for Equilibrium". She writes "As a female, she (Woolf) believed that her vision, though ideally bisexual, should on the whole be distinctly feminine, that is "woman-manly" as opposed to "man-womanly". Nancy Topping Bazin Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973): 5.

[61] There are several critics who have concerned themselves with Woolf's concept of androgyny and its prevalence in her characters. Herbert Marder has a chapter "The Androgynous Mind" which discusses these characters mentioned above in his work Feminism and Art in Virginia Woolf (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1968). Other critics who write about these characters in conjunction with androgynous properties include Nancy Topping Bazin Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973) and Carolyn Heilbrun "Woolf and Androgyny" in Morris Beja (ed) Critical Essays (Boston: G.K.K.Hall and Co. 1985).

[62] Woolf, To the Lighthouse (Harvard: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1964), The Waves(Harvard: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1978), Mrs Dalloway (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1953), A Room of One's Own (Harvard: Harcourt Brace and Jovanovich, 1963).

> whether there are two sexes in the mind corresponding to the two sexes in the body . . . And in the man's brain, the man predominates over the woman, and in the woman's brain, the woman predominates over the man. The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties.[63]

Woolf's conceptualization of the female self as one of fusion and transcendence, I argue, is not so very far away from Porter's view. In Jane Demouy's words, Porter realizes that "on the psychological level. . . the contemporary woman needs independence as much as she needs love; she needs an androgyny that society will deny her."[64] In studying Porter and Woolf, I examined Porter's personal copies of Virginia Woolf's works (of which she had many), and it perhaps is no coincidence that in one particular essay by Woolf, "Donne After Three Centuries" (in The Second Common

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[63] Woolf, A Room of One's Own: 171.

[64] Demouy: 8.

Reader: 27), Porter had stressed with a pencil the following words: "can we at length choose out the one quality that is essential and adhere to it and so make peace among the warring elements and pass into a state of being which transcends the 'Hee and Shee'?" This, we may assume, indicates a point upon which Woolf and Porter agree wholeheartedly.

Certainly to varying degrees Amy and Miranda fit Jones's physical description of the antithetical 'Belle' as well as being headstrong. Consider the opening description of Amy as she appears in the photograph: "a spirited-looking young woman, with dark curly hair cropped and parted on the side, a short oval face with straight eyebrows, and a large curved mouth"(173). Amy in actual fact has a frail state of health (hinted to be tuberculosis), but her "boyish" strength of spirit overrides her delicate constitution as shown by her impetuous horse-ride to the border. In this manner Amy diverges from the traditional behaviour of the "Southern Lady" who would have nursed and cherished her fragile constitution as a sign of her extreme femininity and gentility. Like Amy, Miranda is "tom-boyish" in both her actions and aspirations. Neither of these women could be described as demure and mild. Miranda, we learn in the last part of the story, has run off from her family to marry at a very young age (it surprises cousin Eva), and she is in the

process of leaving this man too:

> She was not going back to her husband's family either. She would have no more bonds that smothered her in love and hatred. She knew now why she had run away to marriage, and she knew that she was going to run away from marriage.(220)

Both Miranda and Amy are "assertive" and in many ways are "active 'masculinized' women who reject their preordained role."[65] They do not fulfill the feminine ideal -- that women should be passive, submissive, taken care of by men and gracious, and pleasing to the minds of men. Instead Porter's women possess "character" and a "deepening sense of self" that defy the criteria for the cult of true womanhood.

Porter's Miranda rests on the brink of realizing that something other than the stage one represented by Amy or stage two represented by Eva is available to her. Porter, however, leaves it unclear whether Miranda will break free and find this "other" space -- hence the ambiguous ending: "At least I can know the truth about what happens to me, she assured herself silently, making a promise to herself, in her hopefulness, her ignorance"(221). Despite Miranda's promise to herself, the last words of the story undermine

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[65] Demouy: 7.

her self-realization.[66] The contradictory and uncertain ending can be explained by the author's frustration with more subtle forms of cultural restrictions. It suggests that Porter was resigned to the inevitable outcome of socialization dominating over the best will in the world and that in both Amy's and Eva's bid for living without male influence neither could succeed in being beyond its pervasive and all-inclusive reign. In this way as Vanashree observes :

> Like Virginia Woolf's, Porter's experiences disclose struggle against not only physical enslavement and restraints, but against the conditioning which induced ignorance and the habitual silencing of feelings, and encouraged participation in phoney respectability and

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[66] A parallel ambiguity can be seen at the end of The Tempest with the fate of Shakespeare's Miranda. It is questionable whether Miranda has truly broken free from the vestiges of the old world by entering into the "brave new world" she so keenly desires. In act V towards the close of the play and following the famous exclamation by Miranda, both Ferdinand and Alonso discuss Miranda only in terms of their and her father's ownership of her and refers to her new and old filial roles that continue to bind her. Ferdinand says emphatically ". . . she is mortal/But by immortal providence she's mine. . . She is the daughter to this famous Duke of Milan. . . " and Alonso replies using the possessive pronoun in regards to Miranda "But Oh, how oddly will it sound that I must ask my child for forgiveness." In perhaps the same way there is a doubt cast over the Porter's Miranda's real escape from such encasing domestic roles dictated by life. The endings of the two texts are significantly inconclusive.

ideas.[67]

It shows Porter acknowledges the limiting factors beyond the control of the most determined female individuals such as Miranda.

The purpose of the paradoxical ending of "Old Mortality," Vanashree suggests, is to illustrate the burden of being torn between social conditioning and natural impulses. [68] This conflict is apparent in Eva, who has made her life out of campaigning for female liberation and yet criticizes Amy for her negation of the attributes considered essential to the cult of true womanhood:

> She rode too hard, and she danced too freely, and she talked too much, and you would have to be blind not to have noticed her. I don't mean she was too loud or vulgar just that she was too free.(215)

It seems odd that such a strong advocate of female rights should judge so severely Amy's apparent freedom. It suggests that Eva's opinion of Amy has more to do with jealousy than objectivity.

Showalter offers another way of reading the paradoxical behaviour of Porter's female protagonists, relating it to Porter's cultural and historical position as a post-World War One writer. Showalter stresses the effect of war and

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[67] Vanashree, 84.

[68] Vanashree, 83.

the suffrage movement on women writers. She claims that the violence of the self as manifested in war apparently made these writers shy away from the demands of the individual narrative self. They were forced to witness masculine behaviour at its worst and thus turned inward, only to discover a frightening similarity between the activist militancy of the suffragists and masculine behaviour in war. In consequence, protagonists were drawn as "openly and insistently female" yet "oddly impersonal and renunciatory at the same time."[69] This may help to explain why Amy is not as radical as she might have been, why she is coerced into conforming and taking up the institution of marriage and why the suffragist Eva is not promoted as the ideal role model for woman. Miranda, like her namesake in The Tempest and like the women immediately following World War One, is searching out her new world and carving out for herself her new identity.

Society framed a new role for many women after the war to accommodate the changes on the political and social map. This "Feminist-New Style,"[70] was created by patriarchy to cope with the dramatic changes: women smoking, cutting their hair, shortening their skirts and wanting more equality in

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[69] Showalter 240.

[70] Dorothy D.Bromley, "Feminist New-Style," Harper's Magazine CLV (Oct, 1927): 556.

the workplace. In this role women were grateful for their new status in the work place but were equally encouraged to embrace their family responsibilities. Miranda does not fit this description as she is in the process of escaping the unworkable (for her) "compromise" of family and work, a dual role engineered by a patriarchal society for its own economic benefit.

At the end of "Old Mortality" we learn that Miranda has turned away from the institution of marriage but does not feel any desire to join the ranks of the militant feminists like her cousin Eva. Miranda is the story's hope for women's quest for an alternative state of being which is not merely a response to the male order. The hope and possibility that Miranda evokes is shared by Elizabeth in Mrs Dalloway. According to Carolyn Heilbrun,

> Only Elizabeth Dalloway, whose Chinese eyes Lily Briscoe will share, seems to contemplate the possibility of not being a wife. Evading Miss Kilman on one side, her mother on the other, not caring for the men who find her lovely, Elizabeth,

in a new world, may find her way.[71]

Both Woolf's character Elizabeth and Porter's Miranda offer the promise of some other definition of female identity. These fictional effigies represent the latent striving of their authors to create for themselves as women a more fulfilling space in society.

"Old Mortality" can be read in the light of Julia Kristeva's feminist theory. Written in 1979, "Women's Time" is Kristeva's important analysis of feminism as an international movement in the 1970s.[72] In it Kristeva questions the efficacy of modern feminism and probes the concept of an alternative space such as the one Porter suggests Miranda yearns to reach.

Kristeva urges us to work through the old methods and usage of the feminist rhetoric and push forward into a greater area wherein the possibilities of an alternative "human dialogue" free of sexual differences might exist. In "Women's Time" she traces the course of feminism into two interlocking yet distinguishable phases. Energised from these interdependent phases, she predicts a liberating third and final phase in the evolution of the women's movement. In this third phase she foresees that feminism as an

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[71] Heilbrun: 81.

[72] Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," Signs, Autumn 1981 Trans. Harry Blake and Alice Jardine.

ideology will no longer be necessary, since here the view that gender is a metaphysical construct will be a universal truth.

Kristeva's first phase identifies the "struggle of suffragists and existential feminists" who "aspired to gain a place in linear time of project and history"(18). In the first phase, women demand equal access to the symbolic order; in other words, it is a form of liberal feminism desiring "equality." The first stage is associated with the feminism of the early twentieth century when women involved in feminism in Britain and America were campaigning for the vote and based their argument on "equality." Many women who belonged to the suffragist movement or saw themselves as bluestockings of the Bloomsbury set rejected traditional maternal roles and demanded access to male-dominated spheres. Kristeva venerates the suffragists, citing their achievements in organizing

> the political demands of women: the struggles for equal pay, for equal work, for taking power in social institutions on an equal footing with men; the rejection when necessary, of the attributes traditionally considered feminine or maternal. . . (18-19)

The benefits gained from the likes of Emily Pankhurst who used a general concept of "woman" to improve the political

and social status of women in Victorian England have continued to have positive effects "even more important than the Industrial Revolution" (19). The "Universal Woman" label was a critical initial step for the movement. It was, "and rightly so, reactionary," and it fought to be a part of the dominant culture, rather than at this stage questioning it.

In stage two, women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. This attitude could be described as radical feminism wherein being a woman and not a man is extolled. This assertion of "difference" can be traced in the post-1968 women's movement. In this movement a concept of a separateness exists and from it emerged the notion of "woman" as "Other" examined by Simone de Beauvoir in The Second Sex (1946).[73] In this stage many advocates are expressing the aesthetic and psychoanalytic difference of experience and feeling. In Kristeva's words, "language was given to a muted subject of women" especially by writers. There was a strong tide of opinion that women should own their own language apart from the masculine one. Kristeva warns, however, that this kind of feminist may be in danger of "counter investing the violence she has endured, make of herself a 'possessed' agent of this violence in order to

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[73] Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (translated and edited by H M Parshley, London: Jonathon Cape, 1953).

combat what was experienced as frustration."[74] Kristeva is concerned that the second stage of feminism will be guilty of inverted sexism by totalizing this plural women as "we." Kristeva believes the way forward for feminism is rooted in multiplicity and pluralism of expression. Kristeva would like to see feminism as a concept of femininity which would take as many forms as there are women.[75]

Individuality is something both Woolf and Porter champion, hence their general resistance to the organised feminist groups' moves to make them rally under their banner. The postmodern French feminist attitude toward the label "feminism" stems from the fear that any kind of political idiom such as "liberal," "socialist," or "feminist" will reveal itself as yet another master discourse.[76] Bette London observes that Kristeva and others associated with the school of French feminist thought have made an important contribution to the study of feminism. London writes:

> For in its theoretical critique of masculine discourse and its performative resistance to that

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[74] Kristeva,"Women's Time": 28.

[75] Kristeva, "Talking About Polylogue" in Toril Moi (ed) French Feminist Thought: A Reader (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987): 111-117.

[76] Toril Moi's introduction to Kristeva's "About Chinese Women" in Toril Moi (ed) Kristeva Reader (Oxford, Blackwell, 1986).

> discourse's operative modes, French feminism (in its various manifestations) demonstrates the limits of feminine language, voice, writing. By limits I mean both the constraints upon the articulation of the feminine -- constraints embedded in the pervasive (masculine) structures of our thinking -- and the outer boundaries of such an enterprise, as articulated in its dramatisation of excessive and transgressive possibilities.[77]

London concludes that French feminism has brought an introspective questioning element about the nature, mechanisms and "enterprise" of "Feminism." Labels that represent women are reductive. It is precisely this sort of label which Lyndall Gordon criticises James King for applying in his 1994 biography of Woolf: "the label of deviance could not be more alien to the way Woolf herself experienced existence. Her works question the tyranny of labels in reducing experience . . . "[78] Postmodern feminists wish to see an avoidance of such terms which suggest a "unity that blocks difference," as it

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[77] London: 22.

[78] Lyndall Gordon "Stay Away from the Big Bad Woolf" a review of Virginia Woolf by James King, in The Times Higher Education Supplement (14.10.94): 18.

demonstrates the same dogmatic principles as patriarchy.[79] Kristeva reinforces this view:

> Indeed, the time has perhaps come to emphasise the multiplicity of female expressions and preoccupations so that from the intersections of these differences there might arise, more precisely, less commercially, and more truthfully, the real fundamental difference between the two sexes. . . (18)

Plurality and individuality are very important to Kristeva and others who hold the similar view that "Woman" as a homologenous "Other" is seriously damaging in the same way that the term "Feminism" is self-defeating. Kristeva writes:

> I think that the apparent coherence which the word "woman" assumes in contemporary ideology, apart from its "mass" or "shock" effect for activist purposes, essentially has the negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions or structures that operate beneath this word.[80]

This is why Kristeva and other postmodern feminists are critical of the use of the concept "woman." Kristeva argues passionately that there is no such thing as "woman"

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[79] Rosemarie Tong, Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989): 217 and Chapter 8 "Postmodern Feminism."

[80] Kristeva, "Women's Time": 18.

but that the "feminine" position is purely a metaphysical one. Believing that "woman" is a false construct, Kristeva argues that there is no such thing as women's writing because anatomy does not cause women to be or write any differently from men. Kristeva extrapolates her view that there exists no such tangible thing as "woman" - "in 'woman' I see something that can not be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies" -- when she asserts her conviction that the person who is liberated has moved a stage beyond the gender labels of "man"/"woman" and is instead able to acknowledge the inter-play of both the semiotic and the symbolic within themselves.[81] However, in recognising the dangers within the pejorative term "woman," there does spring a hope in Kristeva's paradigm:

> Hope . . . that having started with the idea of difference, Feminism will be able to break free of its belief in Woman, Her power, Her writing so as to channel the demand for difference into each and every element of the female whole, and, finally, to bring out the singularity of each female individual . . . .[82]

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[81] Kristeva, cited in Sneja Gunew Feminist Knowledge Critique and Construct (London, New York: Routledge, 1990): 193.

[82] Kristeva, "Woman's Time": 33

Kristeva envisions the second stage energising the ideal third stage.

Both Woolf's and Porter's writings lend themselves to a postmodern French feminist reading. Their female characters are similarly kaleidoscopic in composition and have uniquely formed interior landscapes. Woolf and Porter could be considered postmodern feminists, ahead of their time in their attempt to keep a feminist discourse from colonising their art and reducing individual experience into ideological labels. Both authors suggest a propensity to search for a situation where, in Kristeva's terms, "the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics" (33).

Each character's dialogue between self-image and role model in "Old Mortality" can be described in terms of Kristeva's three-tiered strata of feminist struggle set out in her article "Women's Time."[83] The third stage is closest to Miranda; for example, Miranda as a young girl cannot foresee any biological or gender barriers to the "notion of being a jockey" that "came suddenly and filled her thoughts"(196). She has unconsciously assumed equal access to the symbolic order; rather than seeing her aspirations

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[83] Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time." Trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. Signs 7 (1981): 13-35.

to become a jockey as an act of female defiance (stage two) or consciously demanding equality (stage one), she is simply unaware of the social dichotomy between gendered occupations. It could also be argued that Amy is representative of the first stage of the Kristeva strata in her demands to be a part of the male world; Cousin Eva is fixed in the second stage with her political suffragist stance, leaving Miranda, who wishes to reject the two models of femininity given by Amy and Eva, hoping for a better opportunity (third stage) not yet created.

This third stage is crucial, as Toril Moi points out, if women are not to remain at stage two which "runs the risk of becoming an inverted form of sexism."[84] Political struggle is an important step on the path, but the ultimate goal which Moi attributes to Woolf is the total breakdown of female/ male oppositions with the resulting liberation that comes with stage three. Miranda holds the most promise for breaking down these barriers -- she is emblematic both of Porter's hope for women and her frustration with the proscriptions of male culture. Like Miranda, Porter imagines that there exists an alternative space which comes from narrating one's own story. As a writer, then, Porter can be seen to occupy the final stage of Kristeva's model, free from sexual definitions. She

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[84] Moi 13.

does not use her short stories as a political arena to vent her anger about the plight of women or assert female uniqueness. On the contrary, Porter, like Woolf, resists being curtailed by a feminist political agenda, preferring to concentrate freely on producing an interesting and complex work of art.

Porter is by no means limited by the polarization encountered in a gender-conscious world; her fiction has no such self-imposed restrictions because when she writes she possesses the androgynous vision which, according to Woolf, is shared by all great artists. Moi uses this ultimate stage of the absence of all gender distinctions (including metaphysical ones) to characterize Virginia Woolf's feminism, arguing that Woolf has an important contribution to make to feminist literature when seen in the light of Kristeva's model. I argue that the same model can be applied to Porter, with the same conclusion. Porter has by the very act of writing surpassed stage one in the process of gaining equal access to the writing profession. She has briefly entertained the position of stage two in her female centred writings, works like the biography of the Puritan Cotton Mather's wife, "Catherine the Great,""A Defence of Circe," and the revised feminist structured fairy tales written for children. In this stage two, Porter, much as Woolf in her pamphleteer style work Three Guineas, asserts

"woman" in the name of difference. Stage three is the optimum level of consciousness and is traceable in the fiction of Woolf as being the desirable place beyond androgyny, although most powerfully imagined in Porter's Miranda. This third and final stage in Kristeva's vision is the one in which women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as owing to the realisation that it lies in the metaphysical realm. Kristeva's third stage could be approximated to articulate the hope for the aims of feminism for now and the future, a hope that Woolf and Porter's writing anticipated.

CONCLUSION

Both Amy and Miranda are on a quest to find the "self." Amy is strong-willed and fights all the codes of female conduct. She shortens her skirt, cuts her hair off, and insists on walking the streets of Mardi Gras in the androgynous clothing of a "domino" instead of watching the festivities safely from the balcony. She rides daringly on the "rowdy lark" to the border with her brother and is described by Eva as a "devil and a mischief-maker" (189, 211). Like Amy, Miranda struggles with her prescribed gender role, wishing instead to be free, clinging to those childhood private dreams of becoming a jockey in the face of her father's insistence of its inconceivability for a woman. "Old Mortality" ends with Miranda actively seeking freedom from the roles of the past: "She knew that she was going to run away from marriage, and she was not going to stay in any place, with anyone who threatened to forbid her making her own discoveries, that said 'no' to her" (220). Miranda is embarking on a quest for her own place. This in-between area is precisely where Porter's own biographer places Miranda's creator. According to Joan Givner, Porter

was "torn between wishing to be an accomplished, independent woman, speaking out on literature and world events and wishing to be a charmingly capricious belle, sought after for her beauty and arousing chivalrous thoughts in every male breast."[85] I would argue, however, that she was not torn but that she existed in this in-between space she made for her self. Like Miranda, Porter does not have to choose from among female roles like the capricious southern belle Amy or the sterile intellectual Eva. She could and did in fact exist somewhere in a space of her own making.[86] In this respect Porter and Miranda are similar to Woolf and the female protagonists she creates, such as Katherine in Night and Day, who balances her enjoyment of mathematics and astronomy (traits of the masculine world) with pastimes traditionally considered feminine such as pouring tea surrounded by the beautiful things in the drawing room of her mother's house on an "at home" occasion. Herbert Marder concludes on the subject of Woolf's shaping a role for herself:

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[85] Joan Givner, ed., Katherine Anne Porter: Conversations (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1987): xiv, cited in Suzanne Jones' "Reading the Endings in Katherine Anne Porter's 'Old Mortality'," P.40.

[86] Darlene Harbour Unrue advocates Porter's individual triumph over her gender role when she writes, "it was Porter the artist that consciously transcended Porter the woman." Unrue,"Katherine Anne Porter and Henry James: A Study in Influence," Southern Quarterly 31 (Spring, 1993): 20.

> Her energies were directed differently from the majority of feminists who were concerned mainly with eliminating specific abuses and not much interested in trying to discover the causes of tyranny. If her attitude was less active than theirs, her vision was more comprehensive. Long after woman won the vote she was at work with her pen, shaping a role for herself.[87]

Both Woolf and Porter aim to transcend their roles as women to achieve the higher realm of "artist." They do not allow politics to dominate their aesthetics, but demonstrate with excellence of style and form their female characters' struggles with "selfhood" in the patriarchal world. Vanashree summarises:

> Porter's fiction should be considered the biography of woman. She has produced a vast variety of feminist experience in microcosmic form. In this sense she shares with Woolf a shift away from the self conscious philosophical superiority of the male tradition, towards the lives of the obscure, the marginalised. In totality, she displays a sort of turning from the outward to the inner landscape . . . [88]

Woolf and Porter have been subject to the same insensitive

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[87] Marder 20

[88] Vanashree, vii

readings, namely being accused of not being feminist enough, when clearly both authors deal with the subject of imprisoned female characters who, as Margeret Bolsteri points out, "could neither take their lives into their own hands nor achieve self-realization outside the roles society had chosen for them."[89]

Julia Kristeva offers a guiding torch by which to read these two accomplished authors and helps to shed light on the parable of "Old Mortality." In "Chinese Women" Kristeva outlines the dangers of the two kinds of extremes which women adopt to refute the male order. She speaks of the suffragist types that "play supermen" and are just as false to themselves (exemplified by Eva?) and the second band of women who hold back in writing and speaking which produces a hysterical permanent state of expectation (Amy?). What Kristeva passionately calls for in this essay is "let us refuse both extremes" and "let us reject the development of the homologous woman."[90] Her desire to move away from the two extremes of female defiance does not mean she is turning her back on the struggle with the male order. Instead she is encouraging a shared vision of the

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[89] Margaret Bolsterli, "Bound Characters in Porter, Welty, McCullers: The Pre-Revolutionary Status of Women in American Fiction" Bucknell Review XXV (spring, 1978): 95-105.

[90] Kristeva, "About Chinese Women" in Kristeva Reader edited by Toril Moi, (Oxford: Blackwell,1986) 155/56.

rewards for braving the conflict of the first and second stages. She emphatically advocates that women should:

> swim against the tide ... but let us not take the role of the revolutionary whether male or female. Let us on the contrary refuse all roles to summon this 'truth' situated outside time.(156)

Kristeva accurately although unintentionally describes Miranda's quest:

> What is the truth, she asked herself as intently as if the question had never been asked . . . and where shall I begin to look for it? Her mind closed stubbornly against remembering, not the past but the legend of the past, other people's memory of the past, at which she had spent her whole life peering in wonder like a child at a magic lantern show. (221)

Miranda rejects the roles imposed upon her and the versions of 'truth' given to her packaged in the distortions of the past. Instead she looks for her own answers "outside time." Miranda is what her name means, not in the Shakespearean Latin sense of "strange and wonderful" although she is that as well, but in Porter's Spanish meaning -- "the seeing one." Miranda, Porter, Kristeva, and Woolf visualize a future space that women might ideally occupy.

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